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# ER CHURCH

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First Baptist Church (Meeting House), Providence, R. I.

# THE MOTHER CHURCH

A BRIEF ACCOUNT OF THE ORIGIN
AND EARLY HISTORY OF THE FIRST
BAPTIST CHURCH IN PROVIDENCE

BY
HENRY MELVILLE KING, D. D.

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To the Sacred Memory

OF THOSE OF PAST GENERATIONS, WHOSE
PRAYERS AND TOILS AND SELF-DE-
NIALS HAVE MINISTERED TO
THE UNBROKEN LIFE
OF THE

FIRST BAPTIST CHURCH IN PROVIDENCE

AND TO THE
LIVING MEMBERS OF
THE CHURCH WHO HAVE IN-
HERITED A LEGACY OF PECULIAR
HONOR AND GREAT RESPONSIBILITY
THIS BRIEF ACCOUNT OF ITS EARLY HISTORY

Is Affectionately Dedicated

# PREFACE

AMERICAN Baptists must always be interested in the beginnings of the denomination in this country. The present wide discussion indicates that the interest does not abate as the years go by. Every fresh effort to bring to light the facts of our early history is certain to receive a cordial welcome. What we all desire to know is the truth, that we may honor those to whom honor is due, and gather courage and inspiration from the heroic example, the loyal fidelity, and the patient sufferings of the fathers. An intimate acquaintance with the history of the past ought to enable us to make better history in the future. Amid the discussions which are constantly arising, we realize more and more the importance of preserving all records and historic documents. Complete records pertaining to the first century of our denominational history in this country would be invaluable.

This little volume contains a brief address on the early Baptists of Rhode Island, which was prepared by request, and delivered in the First Baptist meeting-house in Providence, July 16, 1895, before the Massachusetts delegates *en route* to the Baltimore

Convention of the Baptist Young People's Union of America. It is allowed to remain as it was delivered, because it presents in careful outline, unencumbered by discussions, the early history of the First Baptist Church which is believed by the church to be correct, and has been accepted generally by historians and by the denomination. Explanatory notes have been added, covering matters of great historical interest not generally known, giving reasons for statements made in the address, describing the present venerable meeting-house occupied by the First Baptist Church (Note 16), and discussing at considerable length the baptism of Roger Williams (Note 4), and also the questions of the priority of the church, and the unbroken continuity of its life (Notes 18, 19, and 20). Access has been had to all published documents relating to these matters, as far as known, and valuable manuscript testimony recently discovered has been adduced, which throws light upon some points which have been in dispute. Some features of the early history of this church, which is believed to be the first Baptist church in America, are presented here with a completeness of treatment which they have not thus far received.

I desire to acknowledge my indebtedness to Reuben A. Guild, LL. D., librarian emeritus of Brown University, for valuable assistance in the preparation of these notes.

The names of Roger Williams and the First Baptist Church in Providence will always be associated with each other, and with the great principle of religious liberty, as well as with the origin of our denominational life in America. It is coming to be conceded more and more that this sublime doctrine was first promulgated by the Anabaptists of the old world, and has been realized in civil government largely by the efforts of the Baptists of the new world. Roger Williams, as the founder of the free State in which the government is in the hands of the people and restricted to civil affairs, and citizenship is without religious tests, is held in superior honor by all lovers of liberty. As the pioneer advocate in this country of a regenerate church, whose corner-stone is personal loyalty to Christ and his word, he can never be forgotten by American Baptists.

H. M. K.

June, 1896.

# THE MOTHER CHURCH[1]

THIS is not the first time that Rhode Island has given hospitable welcome to exiles from the Massachusetts Bay. Ever since the days of Roger Williams, who, after being banished from Salem and wandering many days in the wintry wilderness, "not knowing what bread or bed did mean," found on this side of the Seekonk a safe retreat which, in recognition of the Divine leading and care, he gratefully called "Providence," Rhode Island has been somewhat noted for its hospitality. We are not of those who ask "Can any good thing come out of Nazareth?" To all who believe in religious liberty, in freedom of thought and of worship, in a spiritual church, in loyalty to Christ in all things, we extend a cordial welcome, whether for a brief visit or a longer stay. Once, when Roger Williams desired to visit the mother country by way of the Massachusetts Bay, that being the nearer route, he was forbidden to do so, and was not allowed to

[1] An address delivered in the First Baptist Meeting-house in Providence, before the Massachusetts delegates *en route* to the Baltimore Convention of the Young People's Baptist Union, July 16, 1895.

cross its territory, lest his "pestilential" doctrines should infect the very atmosphere. He was compelled to go by way of New York, the New Netherlanders, who had tasted the spirit of a larger freedom in their old home, and had there sheltered the Pilgrim fathers and mothers during eleven most influential years, not being afraid of the presence or doctrine of this apostle of soul liberty, but bidding him welcome to their borders, and God-speed on his journey. We give you the freedom of our State, to cross it at your leisure, without let or hindrance, and if, on your return, you shall be sufficiently charmed with what you see to stay with us for the rest of your days, not the slightest obstacle will be placed in your way. To such immigration we set no restriction. You will not be officially admonished that your presence is not wanted, and that "it is better farther on," or farther off, as was Roger Williams even by the Pilgrim fathers, who feared to give offense to the inhabitants of the Bay by harboring the exile within their borders (Note 1); nor will you be "warned off of the face of God's earth," as was one of the preachers in Massachusetts in the last century, who dared to be a Baptist, and with the Baptists stand. (Note 2.)

You stand to-day on historic ground. Not far away from this spot, directly east, Roger Williams crossed the river with his five companions, and received upon the hither shore the kindly greeting of

the aboriginal inhabitants. (Note 3.) Not far away from this spot he was baptized by Ezekiel Holiman, in the likeness of the Saviour's death, and in turn baptized Mr. Holiman and ten others, they together making the apostolic number and constituting the first church of immersed believers in Christ in this new world. (Note 4.) Not far away from this spot, a little to the north, was the home of Roger Williams, where he thought and planned and prayed to God, and gave utterance to those sublime truths which have made his name resplendent on the page of history, and where he reared his little family amid the hardships and exposures of the almost unbroken forest; and not far away was the orchard in which his body at last found a peaceful resting-place. (Note 5.)

Not far from this spot those first settlers proceeded at once to make "covenantes of peaceable neighborhood with all the sachems and natives round about," and then, having gained rightful ownership of the land, they entered into covenant among themselves to establish here, in the immortal words of their distinguished leader, "a shelter for all persons distressed of conscience." (Note 6.) And so, not far away from this spot, was founded a civil State which protected the rights of conscience, which provided that no person should be molested, punished, or proscribed, for any differences of religious belief, but that perfect freedom should

be offered to all persons who chose to come; and here, in this Baptist colony, which for years was the object of Puritan scorn and hate, was ordained, for the first time in the history of the world, a civil government whose corner-stone was absolute soul liberty. (Note 7.)

"In the code of laws established here," says Judge Story, "we read for the first time since Christianity ascended the throne of the Cæsars, the declaration that conscience should be free and men should not be punished for worshiping God in the way they were persuaded he requires."

It is not claimed that Roger Williams and his *confrères* originated the idea of soul liberty. For a hundred years it had been pleading for recognition in the old world in many voices that were silenced only in death. In 1527, more than a century before, the Swiss Anabaptists at Schleitheim had formulated and proclaimed their famous Confession, the first known Confession in the world in which liberty of conscience was declared to be the indestructible right of all men. In Germany, in Holland, and in England, their successors had reiterated their faith, and been sent to the stake for it. The fires kindled about the helpless bodies of the Anabaptists in these lands are the inextinguishable halo about their names to eyes that have not been blurred by the smoke of prejudice. The General Baptists in London, in 1611, and the Particular

Baptists, in 1644, issued their solemn pronunciamentoes, declaring the absolute separation of Church and State to be the law of Christ. "The magistrate by virtue of his office," they affirmed and reaffirmed, "is not to meddle with religion or matters of conscience, nor to compel men to this or that form of religion; but to leave the Christian religion to the free conscience of any one, and to meddle only with political matters. Christ alone is the King and Lawgiver of the church and conscience."

When a distinguished Episcopal prelate in this country asserts that Roger Williams was the founder of the Baptists, and ascribes to him the origin of the denomination, he is simply publishing his gross ignorance of the facts of history. There was an old world, with its history, its truths, its Confessions, its heroes and martyrs, before the Pilgrims landed on Plymouth Rock, and before Roger Williams was born. Roger Williams was not the beginner of our history, but the hero of a new and splendid chapter. Becoming first a Puritan and then a Separatist, he allowed his convictions to carry him to their logical issue, a thing which the great Reformers did not do, and which the Puritans did only in part. Before leaving England he was acquainted with the language of Holland, which had been consecrated to liberal ideas and broader views of human rights, for in that land liberty had been for years struggling for recognition, and had achieved its most

conspicuous victories; and he had been also on intimate terms with English Baptists, to one of whom, a pastor in London, he paid a noble and grateful tribute: "To the everlasting praise of Christ Jesus, and of his Holy Spirit, breathing and blessing where he listeth, I cannot but with honorable testimony," he wrote in the "Hireling Ministry," "remember that eminent Christian witness and prophet of Christ, even that despised and beloved Samuel Howe who, being by calling a cobbler and without human learning (which yet in its sphere and place he honored), who yet, I say, by searching the Holy Scriptures grew so excellent a textuary, or Scripture-learned man, that few of those high rabbis that scorn to mend or make a shoe, could aptly or readily from the Scriptures outgo him."

"If then, while in England," said Dr. William Hague, the pastor of this church, at its two hundredth anniversary, "Roger Williams held friendly communings with men of such spirit, who were publishing there, at the hazard of reputation and property and life, the same principles which have since attracted the statesman's eye as he has seen them shining among the statutes of this Commonwealth, we need be at no loss to conjecture where he drew them. He learned them from men who derived them from the Bible. The fact is that, although in New England he seemed to stand alone, there were many in old England with whom

he had common sympathies, who cherished the same sentiments, who in some instances suffered for them the loss of all things, clung to them under galling bondage, and proclaimed them amidst the fires of martyrdom."

Quickly upon his arrival in Boston suspicion was aroused against him. He was charged with "Anabaptistry." He was accounted a disturber of the peace. The anger of "the Bay bull," which animal, according to Dr. H. M. Dexter (Note 8), seems to have been chosen the guardian angel of the new world's destinies, was hotly kindled, and Roger Williams, the advanced Puritan, the Pilgrim of the Pilgrims, the ripening freeman, the progressive statesman, the new world product of old world ideas which there had found limited hospitality, in whose mind the leaven of Anabaptism had been slowly working, was driven out, and, in the providence of God, became the chief agent in founding on this spot the first government in human history in which soul liberty was part of its organic law. On the shores of the Narragansett, in the person of the great founder of this church and this Commonwealth, the spirit of Anabaptism (for that was what it was) matured at last in clearness of vision, in definiteness of purpose and conviction, and in immortal action, and here, where you now stand, the ultimate thought of the New Testament for human life and government upon earth was crystallized

into fact, viz., a free church endowed with spiritual life in a free State, built upon human brotherhood and the rights of the individual conscience.

The exact date of the organization of this mother church is unknown. The early settlers of Providence were, for the most part, religious men, and had been members of churches elsewhere. They undoubtedly had worship from the first in humble form in their humble homes. Though debarred from the fellowship of the men and women who claimed a monopoly of the true religion in this new world, they still believed in the communion of saints. Meetings were held, we are told. But many months, possibly two years, passed by before any attempt was made to organize the religious life into church life. Religious opinion was unsettled, and probably far from harmonious. They had no common creed. Perhaps no man as yet felt quite sure of his own creed. This one thing they knew—they were Separatists. Time was needed to discover any permanent basis of agreement or any bond of unity. The baptism of the twelve was the first evidence of any attempt at organized church life. Their Jordan of baptism was their ecclesiastical Rubicon, and at the same time their pledge and sign of a new fellowship. For the knowledge of this important event, in which their separatism culminated and their organic union began, we are indebted to Winthrop's

"Journal," under date of March 16, 1639, which contains the earliest authentic record of it. It may have taken place a month or a year before the record. There was no associated press in those days. News moved at slow pace through the wilderness. Boston and Providence were a thousand miles apart. They had little sympathy or communication with each other. But this earliest record has been accepted generally as the date of the origin of the church. The probabilities place it at least a year before this, for, as Winthrop says, during the previous year, that is between March, 1637, and March, 1638, Mrs. Scott, sister of the celebrated Mrs. Hutchinson, had gone to Providence to live. She, according to Governor Winthrop, was "infected with Anabaptistry," and led Mr. Williams "to make open profession thereof." His well-known kindly feeling toward the exile must have prompted the suggestion that his grave heresy was traceable to a cause outside of himself; as if Roger Williams was not abundantly competent in himself to reach his own conclusions and determine his conduct!

Who the twelve were who were baptized, we cannot be certain, except in the case of Williams and Holiman. The Salem Church subsequently excommunicated Roger Williams and wife, and eight others, viz., John Throgmorton and wife, Thomas Olney and wife, Stukely Westcott and

wife, Mary Holiman and Widow Reeves, all of whom except two were said to have been "rebaptized," and all of whom were associated with Williams in the settlement of Providence. These rebaptized persons and Holiman make nine. Mrs. Scott, who seems to have been badly infected with Anabaptistry, was undoubtedly also one of the number, and her husband, Richard, says that he too belonged to the company, which he distinctly calls "a church." That baptism then, taking place whenever it did, in 1639, or 1638, or 1637, was the beginning of our organized denominational life in this new world. (Note 9.) The elements unhindered crystallized into the divine form. The religious life, having burst through the iron walls of old creeds and the solid masonry of ecclesiastical polities and governments, poured itself, like the life of primitive Christianity, into the inspired matrix and mold. A church after the New Testament pattern came into being, born in loneliness and exile, but born of the Spirit of God, to human appearance self-originated and without lineal descent or pedigree, untouched by priestly hands, unanointed by apostolic grace, and yet a church of Jesus Christ, the fruit of the divine seed of the kingdom, which had been borne safely across the Atlantic on the wind of God's providence and planted in the virgin soil of this western continent, the beginning of a spiritual harvest which

should wave like the golden fields of autumn and spread from ocean to ocean.

Of that church, Roger Williams, the leading spirit, who had previously been invested with ministerial functions, was the accepted teacher and minister. It was a very simple affair. The essentials of church life are exceedingly few and easily understood. There was no creed but the Scriptures, and no ritual but the spontaneous offering of prayer and praise, and the familiar unfolding of the word of truth. Christ was the center and circumference of it all, and the word of Christ was the supreme and only rule of church order and individual life. This mother church, as you may know, has never seen fit to depart in this respect from the example of the founders, which was the example of the apostles. It has never adopted any articles of faith or creedal test, or even any formal covenant. The acceptance of Christ as a personal Saviour, and loving obedience to his commands, have been the only qualifications for membership. And yet, during a continuous life of more than two centuries and a half, it has preserved the essential doctrines of grace and the order of the gospel in substantial purity and in general agreement.

Roger Williams did not remain long in its fellowship, but withdrew and was henceforth known as a Seeker, one of those "who as they looked over

Christendom and saw the corruptions which generally prevailed, concluded the divinely authorized ministry of the church had been lost, and that, before any could be empowered to administer ordinances, a new apostleship must be commissioned." (Note 10.) He became a consistent high-church Baptist, and distrusted the validity of his own ordination and baptism, as every consistent high-churchman must do. He remained, however, in sentiment a Baptist, and declared to the end of his days that the Baptists were nearer the New Testament model than any other branch of the visible church of Christ. (Note 11.) But the little church survived the withrawal of its minister, and gradually increased with the slowly increasing community. Soon the names of eleven new settlers appear upon the town records. Three of them, Chad Brown, William Wickenden, and Gregory Dexter, became actively identified with the church ; and they, with Thomas Olney, one of the constituent members, and Pardon Tillinghast, who was admitted to citizenship in Providence in 1646, served, in turn or together, as its unpaid ministers, for the first three-quarters of a century of its existence. (Note 12.)

You do not expect me to trace the life of this, our oldest church, through its long and eventful history. It is, however, interesting to remember that for sixty years it survived without a house of

worship, public service being held under the trees or in the houses of the people (Note 13), and that its first house was built by its minister, Pardon Tillinghast, at his own expense (Note 14), and was situated on this street (North Main Street), a little farther north, being "in the shape of a hay-cap, with a fireplace in the middle, the smoke escaping from a hole in the roof." (Note 15.) The worshipers must have shut their eyes, or have given wings to their imagination, to have sung in those days such sentiments as these :

> How pleasant, how divinely fair,
> O Lord of hosts, thy dwellings are.

It is interesting to remember that the first house gave way in 1726 to a second, a little more pretentious, it being about forty feet square, which served its purpose for nearly fifty years, and that this, the third house, was built in 1775, when the population of Providence was but little more than four thousand, and was built, as the record says, "for the public worship of Almighty God, and also for holding commencement in." (Note 16.) It is interesting to remember that for one hundred and thirty years the ministers of this church, after the first pastor, were without special training, and conscientiously served without compensation, supporting themselves and their families by the labor of their hands, believing and teaching "that all

those who took anything for preaching were like Simon Magus" (Note 17); and to remember also that for the same period this church was virtually a "Six Principle" church, though there was frequently difference of opinion upon the question, and in two instances there were defections by reason of it. The first was in 1652, led by Thomas Olney, one of the ministers, because a majority of the church insisted upon the laying on of hands as prerequisite to the Communion (Note 18); and the second was in 1771, led by the pastor, Samuel Winsor, Jr., for the very opposite reason, because the majority of the church voted to abandon its adherence to "a doubtful and unessential rite." (Note 19.) The question was not finally settled until after the present century had opened, when Rev. Stephen Gano was pastor. It is said that Mr. Winsor was also influenced in his withdrawal by the introduction of church music at that time, saying that "singing in worship was highly disgustful to him."

The coming of Rhode Island College and President Manning to Providence, in 1770, brought an intelligent enlargement to the church, and a prosperity such as it had never known. President Manning was at once chosen pastor, upon the retirement of Mr. Winsor, and served in that capacity for twenty years. From that time the life of the church and the life of the university have flowed

side by side—rather have intermingled—each giving character and strength to the other, as they have sought to enrich and ennoble the life of men and of the community.

To-day the mother church (Note 20) looks back, after an existence of nearly two hundred and sixty years, to her birth in exile, to her early struggles and hardships endured for the sake of truth and principle and liberty. In addition to her own roll of honor, she recalls the names of that eminent physician and statesman and minister, John Clarke, of Newport, and his companions in tribulation, John Crandall and Obadiah Holmes; of William Witter, of Swampscott; of Thomas Painter, of Hingham; of Henry Dunster, of Harvard College; of Thomas Gould, Thomas Osborne, and John George, of the First Baptist Church in Boston; of William Screven, of Kittery, and of many others, not only in New England, but out of it, who were counted worthy to suffer persecution for Christ's sake and the gospel's. She rejoices that these banishments, these fines, these imprisonments, these cruel whippings, were not endured in vain; that the long, weary, and bitter seed-sowing has yielded a harvest of untold blessing to the nation and the world; that through the heroic fidelity of the fathers the children have entered upon a glorious heritage of exalted privilege and unlimited opportunity.

To-day the mother church looks out upon the prosperous city, with its homes of comfort and refinement; upon the State, with its busy and successful industries and its world-wide commerce; upon the land, with its vast population, its inexhaustible resources, its equality in physical power and moral influence with the mightiest nations of the old world; and as she sees her daughters, fair and beautiful as herself, numerous beyond her fondest expectations, free, absolutely free, to worship God according to the dictates of an enlightened conscience and to do his will on the earth, equipped with endowed institutions of learning, with successful missionary organizations, with multitudinous Sunday-schools, with an intelligent ministry and a consecrated laity, with the wisdom of age and the zeal of an awakened and irrepressible youth, whose coming together from year to year is as the mustering of a victorious army, she exclaims in adoring gratitude: "Verily, verily, what hath God wrought!" And she repeats with renewed confidence the predictive oracle of Jehovah: The Lord said unto my Lord, Sit thou at my right hand, until I make thine enemies thy footstool. The sceptre of thy might Jehovah shall stretch forth out of Zion, saying, Rule thou in the midst of thine enemies. Thy people offer themselves willingly in the day that thou warrest, clad in holy vestments. As the dew from the womb of the morning [as

numerous and beautiful in their holy consecration] is to thee the dew of thy young men.

NOTE 1. Professor William Gammell, in his "Life of Roger Williams," says: "It would appear that when he fled from Salem, he made his way through the forest to the lodges of the Pokanokets, who occupied the country north from Mount Hope as far as Charles River. Ousemaguin or Massasoit, the famous chief of this tribe, had known Mr. Williams when he lived in Plymouth, and had often received presents and tokens of kindness at his hands; and now in the days of his friendless exile, the aged chief welcomed him to his cabin at Mount Hope, and extended to him the protection and aid he required. He granted him a tract of land on the Seekonk River, to which, at the opening of spring, he repaired, and where he 'pitched and began to build and plant.' At this place, also, at this time, he was joined by a number of his friends from Salem." This was on the east side of the river at a beautiful bend, known as Manton's Cove. "But scarcely had the first dwelling been raised in the new settlement, scarcely had the corn which they had planted appeared above the ground, when he was again disturbed, and obliged to move still farther from Christian neighbors and the dwellings of civilized men. 'I received a letter,' he says, 'from my ancient friend, Mr. Winslow, then

Governor of Plymouth, professing his own and others' love and respect for me, yet lovingly advising me, since I was fallen into the edge of their bounds, and they were loth to displease the Bay, to remove but to the other side of the water; and then, he said, I had the country before me, and might be as free as themselves, and we should be loving neighbors together.' "

NOTE 2. This was Rev. Hezekiah Smith, D. D., first pastor of the Baptist church in Haverhill. He had gone to a neighboring town to preach. The constable, a man of diminutive size, was prompted to go, clothed with the majesty of the law, and warn him out of the place. Mr. Smith was a man of commanding presence and noble bearing. The constable was greatly disconcerted, and in his confusion said: "I warn you—off of God's earth." "My good sir," said the preacher, "where shall I go?" "Go anywhere," was the reply; "go to the Isle of Shoals." (Sprague's "Annals of the American Baptist Pulpit," p. 102.)

NOTE 3. "He accordingly soon abandoned the fields which he had planted, and the dwelling he had begun to build, and embarked in a canoe upon the Seekonk River in quest of another spot, where unmolested he might rear a home and plant a separate colony. There were five others, who having joined him at Seekonk, bore him company in the excursion in which he thus went forth to become

the founder of a city and a State. Tradition has handed down among the sons of these earliest citizens of Rhode Island the course and incidents of their singular voyage. As the little bark, thus freighted with the fortunes of a future State, was borne along on the waters of the Seekonk, Williams was greeted by some Indians, from the heights that rise on the western banks of the stream, with the friendly salutation, 'What cheer, Netop? What cheer?' and first came to land at the spot now called Slate Rock" (Professor Gammell's "Life of Roger Williams").

NOTE 4. The fact of the immersion of Roger Williams and his associates was never called in question until about the year 1880. At that time the question was raised by Rev. Henry M. Dexter, D. D., a Congregationalist, who made several very unsuccessful attempts to write Baptist history. The question did not arise from any local facts, familiar or newly discovered, suggesting doubt as to the universally accepted belief. It was solely of the nature of an inference from the alleged later introduction of immersion among the Baptists of England. In 1881 Dr. Dexter published what he called "The True Story of John Smyth, the Se-Baptist," in which he undertook to prove that immersion was a new mode of baptism in England, introduced about 1641. Had he succeeded in proving what he undertook, the inference would

have by no means followed, for Roger Williams was not dependent upon human precedent, and was able to mark out his own course, as was evident in other matters. It is frequently forgotten that immersion, as practised by the Baptists, was not a novel idea. The primitive rite has never been changed in the Eastern church with its hundred millions of adherents, that is, as to form, although the rite in that church is not now dependent upon an antecedent personal faith in Christ. Immersion was also retained in the Western church for many centuries, and is known to have been practised in England in the sixteenth and even in the seventeenth century, although infant baptism had been adopted. According to Dean Stanley, Queen Elizabeth and Edward VI. were immersed when baptized. Even so late as 1644, a clergyman of the Church of England, named Blake, who was rector at Tamworth, said: "I have been an eye-witness of many infants dipped, and I know it to have been the constant practice of many ministers in their places for many years together." The practice of immersion had not entirely ceased in the English cathedrals before it was resumed under their very shadow in the form of believers' baptism. In 1614 Leonard Busher, of London, wrote: "And such as shall willingly and gladly receive the gospel he hath commanded to be baptized in the water; that is, dipped for dead in the water." Undoubt-

edly the Baptists in England were more concerned at first about the subjects of baptism than about the rite itself, as was the case on the Continent; but the spiritual prerequisite having been accepted as scriptural, the rite itself would be gradually conformed to the New Testament norm. Prof. Henry C. Vedder speaks carefully when he says: "While it is certain that from about 1640 immersion was the uniform practice of Baptists, there is every reason to believe that it was at least occasionally practised among them from the first. That they had the idea we know, and practice would naturally have followed the idea." The Swiss Anabaptists of the previous century had been led in the same way. At first rejecting infant baptism and accepting believers' baptism, they soon conscientiously sought to restore the sacred rite to the primitive institution in mode and symbolic meaning, and were immersed in large numbers on profession of their faith in Christ.

It is altogether certain that immersion was practised here and there among the General Baptists of England, of whom there were nearly forty congregations by 1640, for a considerable number of years prior to that date. When and by whom it was first introduced cannot be told. The introduction was probably gradual, and the fact that at first it was not widely known is not to be wondered at. When Edward Barber in 1641 declared that

he was "raised up to divulge this glorious truth," he was undoubtedly sincere in his statement, but we know that his statement was not true. Busher had preceded him by twenty-seven years.

In 1633 the first Particular Baptist church was formed in London, by certain persons who withdrew from a Separatist congregation, because they had come to accept the doctrine of believers' baptism. According to the so-called Kiffin manuscript—though there is some disagreement in the quotations from it—the members of this church being convinced that baptism "ought to be administered by immersion," decided after "sober conference" among themselves for several months to send one of their number, Richard Blount, to Holland, where they had learned that there were Anabaptists who practised immersion, to receive from them scriptural baptism. This they did, "because though some in this nation rejected the baptism of infants, yet they had not as they knew of, revived the ancient custom of immersion." Blount returned, accompanied by John Batten, the teacher of the Holland church, and the members of the London church were thereupon immersed. This is represented as having taken place in 1641. But it would be by no means safe to infer that immersion was then for the first time practised by the Baptists of England. The Particular Baptists apparently at that time "revived the ancient cus-

tom of immersion" among themselves, and undoubtedly from that time immersed exclusively. But their ignorance as to what had taken place before and among other Baptists was no more conclusive evidence of the non-existence of the rite than the ignorance of Edward Barber. Indeed, we have the positive testimony of Dr. Featly, who writing in 1644, declared that near his residence the Baptists had "defiled the rivers with their impure washings for more than twenty years." This is the language of bitter prejudice, and though his feelings led him to speak contemptuously of the practice of immersion, they would not have been likely to tempt him to falsify as to the length of time during which he had knowledge of its being continued. Such testimony seems conclusive, and dates the practice of immersion among English Baptists earlier than 1624, or within ten years of Busher, and makes it quite certain that he rendered obedience to the truth which he believed and taught.

Dr. Dexter failed to prove the late introduction of immersion among the English Baptists, and the inference as to Roger Williams was so unwarranted and unreasonable and so contrary to the testimony of his contemporaries and all the known facts in the case, that it had no influence whatever, and has been regarded by most persons as not worthy of serious consideration.

Pres. William H. Whitsitt, of the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary is, as far as I am aware, the solitary exception. Indeed, he now claims the honor of having discovered the new historic fact (?) and of having suggested the inference as to Roger Williams' non-immersion, and of having called the attention of Dr. Dexter thereto, and complains of the lack of credit. But as he published his opinions in a Pedobaptist paper anonymously, and at about the same time that Dr. Dexter was openly publishing the same opinions, and then allowed fifteen years to go by before he acknowledged the paternity of the anonymous articles, the claim and the complaint seem somewhat out of place. In an article on the Baptists published in the recent edition of Johnson's "New Universal Cyclopædia," Professor Whitsitt says of the baptism of Roger Williams: "The ceremony was most likely performed by sprinkling; the Baptists of England had not yet adopted immersion, and there is no reason which renders it probable that Williams was in advance of them in that regard." It is exceedingly unfortunate that an opinion which is merely an individual conjecture should have been allowed in a popular cyclopædia to appear in the place of established and accredited history, and in the face of it. The contemporaneous and local testimony as to the Providence baptism has always been regarded as abundant and convincing.

Richard Scott and William Coddington, both contemporaries of Williams, one a friend and fellow church-member, and the other an enemy, speak of him in such a way as to leave no possible doubt that his baptism was immersion. Coddington says: "I have known him about fifty years, a mere weathercock, constant only in inconstancy. . . One time for water baptism [Coddington had become a Quaker when he wrote this], men and women must be plunged into the water, and then threw it all down again." This refers to his brief connection with the Baptist church, and his withdrawal because he thought the true baptism had been lost by reason of the break in the line of succession. The language can have no application to any other period or act in the life of Williams. Professor Albert H. Newman, in a review of Dr. H. M. Dexter's "John Smyth, the Se-Baptist," published in *The Examiner* in March, 1882, was inclined to accept the inference that Williams' baptism was sprinking. This he did, as he subsequently confessed (*Examiner*, May, 1896), "somewhat rashly," and "without having specially investigated the question." A thorough study of the evidence *pro* and *con* the immersion theory, compelled him to retract his hastily accepted view and to acknowledge the convincing force of Coddington's testimony. He also said, "I attach little importance to the argument drawn from the fact

that the English Baptists had not as yet reached the conviction that immersion alone is true baptism. Williams was quite as likely as any member of the Southwark (London) congregation to come to an independent conclusion on a point of this kind, and was quite as likely to act promptly on his convictions. Restraining influences which may have delayed action for a number of years in London, were wholly wanting in Providence. That primitive baptism was immersion had been freely admitted by leading reformers, and immersion was the form prescribed in the English Prayer Book. A highly educated man like Williams did not need the example of English Baptists in a matter of this kind." Dr. Newman added that when he had reached this conclusion after a thorough investigation, he submitted it to Dr. H. M. Dexter, and found to his great surprise that he too had been led to adopt the same view. "His answer was entirely in accord with my own conclusion. He expressed the opinion that in the absence of contemporary evidence against immersion, Coddington's statement must be accepted as probably correct."

When immersion is spoken of in English controversial publications, bearing date of 1641 and 1642, as a "new baptism," and one "lately introduced," these terms must not be interpreted too strictly or narrowly. If it had been administered

to believers in Christ for a period of ten years, or even for twenty-five years, the terms would have been accurate. It is abundantly evident that for several years in England much and wide thought had been given to the form of baptism as well as to the proper candidates. The American colonists must all have been aware of the discussion that was going on, and of the changing views, at least in some instances. Rev. Charles Chauncy (subsequently president of Harvard College) arrived at Plymouth from England in 1638, and was desired as assistant to the pastor of the church there. Governor Bradford says of him: "But there fell out some difference about baptizing, he holding it ought to be by dipping, and putting the whole body under water, and that sprinkling was unlawful." The church was willing that he should "practice as he was persuaded," if those who wished to be "otherwise baptized" could have the privilege. To this Mr. Chauncy could not conscientiously agree, and became pastor of the church at Scituate, where it is said he found many members who "held to immersion, some to adult immersion only, and some to immersion of infants as well as adults." Felt says of him, July 7, 1642: "Chauncy, at Scituate, still adheres to his practice of immersion. He had baptized two of his children in this way." If there were no adult immersions at Scituate at that early date it must have been

because there were no candidates, and certainly not because of any lack of faith in the scripturalness of the rite, or reluctance of disposition. Well has Dr. H. S. Burrage asked: "How came Mr. Chauncy to hold such an opinion, if immersion was unknown among the Baptists of England until 1641? And certainly if Mr. Chauncy, in 1638, rejected sprinkling and insisted upon immersion as scriptural baptism, why may not Roger Williams and his associates at Providence have done the same in the following [or possibly the preceding] year?" With this condition of religious thought on both sides of the Atlantic, why should it be thought a thing incredible or improbable that the great Rhode Island leader, the independent thinker, the conscientious actor, the courageous pioneer, should have acted out an interpretation and conviction which he is known to have held? Any inference from the supposed or actual tardiness of English Baptists to follow their convictions as to the non-immersion of Roger Williams, is surely a palpable *non sequitur*, and in the face of explicit testimony, like that of Coddington, cannot be entertained by reasonable historians.

Strong confirmatory evidence that the Providence baptism was immersion, is found in the fact that when John Clarke and Mark Lucar are reported as first administering baptism, there is no intimation of any variance between their practice and the

practice that had been instituted in Providence. Had the Newport baptism been different from the Providence baptism, it is incredible that some record of the fact should not have been made. The Providence church has never for an instant questioned the immersion of its great founder. After the withdrawal of Williams for the reasons which influenced him to take that step, there arose a solicitude in the church as to the validity of the baptism originated among themselves, not as to its mode; but the project of sending a representative to the old world to receive what could be regarded as apostolic baptism by reason of a supposed unbroken succession, was soon wisely abandoned, and from that day to this the church has remained content with the baptism which it received from Williams.

It should be added, moreover, that if Roger Williams and his companions were not immersed when they were "baptized," we have not the slightest intimation as to the time when the change was brought about, and immersion was introduced into the Baptist church in Providence. A belief, therefore, against which not a suspicion was raised for two hundred and forty years, and against which no evidence whatever has been discovered, but in support of which there is the most explicit testimony contemporaneous with the act itself, and on which rests the unbroken history of an existing

church, is not likely to be puffed away by the rash inference of a fertile imagination. One might as reasonably infer that Roger Williams and Ezekiel Holiman have only a mythical existence, or that in the first half of the seventeenth century there was not water sufficient in Narragansett Bay to permit the performance of the rite of baptism. Such destructive historical criticism is likely to leave nothing back of the memory of living men that can be looked upon as established and trustworthy, and no man can be quite sure of being left in undisturbed possession of what he has seen with his own eyes and heard with his own ears. It is preposterous at this late day for a man to rise up and deny, simply on his own authority, the immersion of Roger Williams, and call for proof of a fact so thoroughly established, and for two and a half centuries unquestioned.

Such a student of history is made conspicuous by reason of his solitariness. The *onus probandi* clearly rests upon him who says that Williams and his companions were "most likely sprinkled." Such an assertion should be made only on the most indubitable evidence.

NOTE 5. There are preserved in the museum of Brown University the roots of an apple tree believed to have been nourished by the body of Mr. Williams, and also nails from his coffin and that of his wife.

NOTE 6. Deed of Roger Williams to his associates in 1638 (R. I. Col. Rec., I., 22).

NOTE 7. The following instrument stands without date in the earliest records of the colony, and is believed to be the first form of civil government adopted by the inhabitants :

"We whose names are here underwritten, being desirous to inhabit in the town of Providence, do promise to submit ourselves, in active or passive obedience, to all such orders or agreements as shall be made for public good of the body in an orderly way, by the major consent of the present inhabitants, masters of families, incorporated together into a township, and such others as they shall admit into the same, *only in civil things.*"

NOTE 8. See "As to Roger Williams," p. 119.

NOTE 9. "This has been generally regarded as the establishment of the first Baptist church in America." (See Straus' " Roger Williams," p. 107.)

NOTE 10. Rev. John Stanford, acting pastor of the church from January, 1788, to September, 1789, says in " Baptist Annual Register," p 796 : " Mr. Williams held his pastoral office about four years, and then resigned the same to Mr. Brown and Mr. Wickenden, and went to England to solicit the first charter." But Governor Winthrop and Richard Scott say his connection continued only three or four months. Their testimony is probably to be accepted.

NOTE 11. In a letter to Governor Winthrop, under date of Nov. 10, 1649, he says: "I believe their practice comes nearer the first practice of our great founder, Jesus Christ, than other practices of religion do." In a reply to George Fox in 1672, only eleven years before his death, he gives expression to his unchanged faith in the spiritual nature of a church, and the spiritual qualifications for its membership and ordinances. "After all my search and examinations and considerations, I do profess to believe that some come nearer to the first primitive churches and the institutions and appointments of Jesus Christ than others; as in many respects, so in that gallant and heavenly and fundamental principle of the true matter of a Christian congregation, flock, or society, namely, actual believers, true disciples and converts, living stones, such as can give some account how the grace of God hath appeared unto them." In 1645 he published in London a treatise entitled "Christenings Make not Christians." His views were radical at that time, and thoroughly scriptural, as Baptists believe.

NOTE 12. "It is very difficult to determine their terms of service, or how far each was recognized as pastor. Two or three seem to have been elders at the same time" ("History of the First Baptist Church in Providence, 1639–1877," prepared by Rev. S. L. Caldwell, D. D., and Prof. William Gam-

mell). Rev. C. E. Barrows, D. D., in the "History of the First Baptist Church in Newport," says that that church had elders "besides a pastor," and gives the names of three. It is, however, probable, if not certain, that Dr. Barrows was misled by the record of the election of "three elders" to be assistants to William Coddington in the government of the new colony. They were not called elders of the church. Their office seems to have been purely a civil one. But in Providence there was undoubtedly a plurality of elders in the church, and the descendants of each elder have claimed that their ancestor stood next to Roger Williams in the pastorate. The office could not have involved much labor or any cessation from secular employment. They shared the responsibility of the spiritual oversight of the little church.

In the Second Baptist Church of Newport, however, as late as the first quarter of the eighteenth century, there was a triple pastorate. James Clarke, a nephew of Dr. John Clarke, was ordained as pastor in 1700, at the age of fifty-one, he having been previously a cooper by trade. In 1704 Daniel Wightman was ordained as associate pastor with Mr. Clarke, and in 1729 Rev. John Comer, having become a Six Principle Baptist, resigned the pastorate of the First Church, and became also associate pastor of the Second Church. He served, however, but two years. They were all pastors at

the same time. It was in that year (1729) that Dean Berkeley described the divided religious condition of Newport in these words: "Here are four sorts of Anabaptists, besides Presbyterians, Quakers, Independents, and many of no profession. Notwithstanding so many differences, here are fewer quarrels about religion than elsewhere, the people living peaceably with their neighbors of whatever persuasion. The town of Newport contains about six thousand souls, and is the most thriving in all America for bigness."

NOTE 13. "For over sixty years religion was here, the church was here, but with no house of its own. It found such shelter as it could in open spaces and under trees, when skies were fair; in such houses as could give it hospitality, when driven in by the weather. There was no public building in the town even for civil purposes. After Philip's War, in June, 1676, the annual town meeting was held 'before Thomas Field's house, under a tree by the waterside.'" ("Discourse in the First Baptist Meeting House on the Ninetieth Anniversary of its Dedication, May 28, 1865," by the pastor, Rev. S. L. Caldwell, D. D.)

NOTE 14. Not only did he serve the church without charge, but in a noble and generous spirit, in the year 1700, he built a meeting-house for it on a lot near the corner of North Main and Smith Streets. "In 1711, seven years before his death,

he made a free gift of a deed of the house and land to the church." (Discourse by Dr. Caldwell.)

NOTE 15. Knowles' "Life of Roger Williams," p. 175.

NOTE 16. This house was dedicated on May 28, 1775, President James Manning preaching the sermon on the occasion. It is modeled from a drawing made for the Church of St. Martin's-in-the Fields, near Charing Cross, London, contained in Gibbs' "Designs of Buildings and Ornaments." James Gibbs was a pupil of Sir Christopher Wren. The cost of land and building was a little over £7,000, "lawful money," or about $35,000. Of this amount £2,000 was raised by lottery, a bill having been granted by the General Assembly at the June session, 1774.

The steeple was furnished with a bell weighing two thousand five hundred and fifteen pounds, cast in London, and bearing this quaint inscription :

For freedom of conscience the town was first planted,
Persuasion, not force, was used by the people :
This church is the eldest and has not recanted,
Enjoying and granting bell, temple, and steeple.

In England the chapels of dissenters were not allowed to have either spire or bell. The bell was broken in ringing, and recast in 1787. It then received a new inscription, viz. : "This church was formed A. D. 1639, the first in the State, and the

oldest of the Baptists in America." It was again broken and recast in March, 1844, and a third time in September of the same year. Its present inscription is as follows: "This church was founded in 1639 by Roger Williams, its first pastor, and the first asserter of liberty of conscience. It was the first church in R. I., and the first Baptist church in America." The bell is still rung daily at sunrise, at noon, and at 9 P. M.

The building is eighty feet square, with projections in front and in the rear, and has entrances on the four sides. At first the pews were square, and the two principal aisles crossed each other at right angles in the center of the house. In 1792 the beautiful crystal chandelier, the gift of Mrs. Hope Ives, the daughter of Nicholas Brown, was placed in the audience room. In 1832 the sounding-board was removed, the pulpit lowered, and the top gallery at the west end, which was devoted to the use of colored people, was taken away and an organ introduced. The interior of the house has been several times renovated, modernized, and better fitted for the needs of the church, but the architectural proportions remain undisturbed. Nearly four generations have worshiped under its roof. It stands as a beautiful specimen of the church architecture of the eighteenth century, a highly prized landmark in the city, and the pride of those who make it their religious home. (See "Address

by Hon. Samuel Greene Arnold at the One Hundredth Anniversary of the Opening of the Meeting House," delivered May 28, 1875.)

NOTE 17. Governor Jenckes, writing in 1730, says, however, of Pardon Tillinghast: "He did several times in his teaching declare that it was the duty of a church to contribute toward the maintenance of their elders, who labored in the word and doctrine of Christ; and although, for his part, he would take nothing, yet it remained the church's duty to be performed to such as might succeed him" (Backus, Vol. II., p. 114).

NOTE 18. There is some difference of opinion as to the original attitude of the church in reference to the practice of laying on of hands. The statement of Morgan Edwards, made in 1770, is probably correct: "At first laying on of hands was held in a lax manner, so that they who had no faith in the rite were received without it, and such (saith Joseph Jenks) was the opinion of the Baptists in the first constitution of their churches throughout this colony." Again he says: "Some divisions have taken place in this church. The first was about the year 1654, on account of laying on of hands. Some were for banishing it entirely, among which Rev. Thomas Olney was the chief, who with a few more withdrew and formed themselves into a distinct church, distinguished by the name of Five Point Baptists, and the first of the name in the

province. It continued in being to 1715, when Mr. Olney resigned the care of it, and soon after it ceased to exist." [This must have been Thomas Olney, Jr., who was also an elder, and died in 1722. The father died in 1682.]

Mr. Edwards followed Stephen Hopkins, Governor of Rhode Island and signer of the Declaration of Independence, Rev. John Callender, the Newport pastor, who delivered his famous "Historical Discourse" in 1738, and many others. This view has been generally accepted. Rev. John Comer, also a Newport pastor, in a manuscript diary written about 1730[1], appears to have regarded the Six Principle church, under Mr. Brown, Mr. Wickenden, and Mr. Dexter, as the seceding church. Callender, who has been called "a man of wonderful attainments and accuracy," and whose "Historical Discourse" was preached eight years later than Comer, reviewing the whole matter, took the opposite view. Backus (Vol. I., p. 405) speaks of "those who parted from their brethren about the year 1653, under the leading of Elder Wickenden," and seems to coincide with Mr. Comer, though the language probably means simply that there was a separation. He does not hesitate to call the first church in Providence "The first Baptist church in America," and speaks of the Olney

[1] This diary was published in 1894 by the American Baptist Publication Society.

faction not as the church, but as "a part of the church." Rev. Samuel Adlam, in a pamphlet which appeared in 1850, followed Mr. Comer. He was pastor of the First Church in Newport when he published his views.

Rev. Thomas Armitage, D. D. ("History of Baptists," p. 667), says:

> It seems clear from the statements of the most reliable historians that the first warm contention on the subject at Providence was between Wickenden and Olney, as to whether the point of being "under hands" should be made a test of fellowship; that Olney went out, that Wickenden and Brown remained with the old church, and that in that body, according to Callender, laying on of hands prevailed, and held its own till the days of Manning, when it ceased to be a test of membership, and gradually died out.

Rev. H. S. Burrage, D. D., in "History of Baptists in New England," p. 28, takes the same view. He says: "Mr. Olney's party withdrew from the church, and maintained a separate existence until about 1718.

Rev. S. L. Caldwell, D. D., in a discourse preached at the two hundred and fiftieth anniversary of the church (1889), says:

> The fanciful theory that in this movement of Olney the historic continuity of the church was disrupted, and we lost our antiquity and our primacy, goes to pieces on the facts. Just as well say the church lost its previous history, when in 1771 Winsor and his associates went out for a reason just

opposite to that which led out Olney and his dissenters. In both cases the church lived and continued and survived the schism.

There has been no difference of opinion as to the fact of a division in the church in 1652, 1653, or 1654, or as to the cause of the division. The main question to be answered is, what was the prevailing sentiment in the church, before the division, on the point in discussion? The answer to that will enable us to determine which part of the church seceded. A second question, the answer to which cannot be doubtful is, would a division of the church, in such circumstances and on such grounds, in any way inhibit the surviving part of the church from claiming to be the church, and dating its origin at the beginning of the original church?

Mr. Comer's language, as quoted by Dr. Armitage, is as follows: "Mr. William Vaughn [a member of the First Baptist Church in Newport], finding a number of Baptists in the town of Providence, lately joined together in special church covenant, in the faith and practice, under the inspection of Mr. Wiggington [Wickenden], being heretofore members of the church under Mr. Thomas Olney of that town, he, that is, Mr. William Vaughn, went thither in the month of October, 1652, and submitted thereto (the laying on of hands), whereupon he returned to Newport, accompanied with Mr. William Wiggington and Mr. Gregory Dexter."

This act led to the formation of the Second Baptist Church in Newport, in 1656. Mr. Comer's record was made more than seventy-five years after the event. The announcement that a part of the church in Providence, which was said indiscriminately to be under the care of Olney or Wickenden, Dexter or Brown, had openly put itself on Six Principle ground, would have been a sufficient cause for the visit of Mr. Vaughn, who had been led to sympathize with that view. Mr. Comer inferred that the Wickenden church was the seceding church, and hence was unable rightfully to claim an origin prior to the separation.

The only advocates of this view in the North have been two or three pastors of the First Church in Newport, the priority of which would be secured by its adoption. Prof. Henry C. Vedder ("A Short History of the Baptists," p. 155) thinks the question a difficult one to settle. He says "Whether the First Baptist Church of Providence is the lineal successor of this church founded by Roger Williams is a difficult historical question, about which a positive opinion should be expressed with diffidence. Tradition maintains that the line of succession has been unbroken ; but the records to prove this are lacking." All other Baptist historians either declare the Olney party to be the seceding church, or accepting the language of Mr. Comer, do not see that it affects at all the question of the

priority of the existing First Church in Providence. It is difficult to say how much the landmarker spirit among the Southern Baptists, which would deny the validity of the baptism of Roger Williams, and of course that of his successors, because he was baptized by an unbaptized person, has had to do with the disposition in certain quarters of late to give the priority to the Newport church.

In reference to the attitude of the church prior to the division, it may be said that there is positive evidence from his writings that Roger Williams held to the laying on of hands as a fitting sequel to baptism and a rite of equal importance and sacredness. His view found expression in his "Bloody Tenet," "Bloody Tenet, yet More Bloody," and "Hireling Ministry." These works were published between 1643 and 1652, all of them before the division in the church took place. How early Roger Williams adopted the view it is impossible to determine, probably some years before 1643. Knight, in his "History of the Six Principle Baptists," calls him "the parent and founder" of that denomination. This is unquestionably an overstatement, for it is not known that he was active in spreading the rite and winning adherents to it. The principal men, however, associated with him, with the single exception of Olney, held the same view. When the schism occurred, Brown, Wickenden, and Dexter were all opposed to Olney, and

undoubtedly the majority of the church were with them, and would not naturally be called the seceding party. Comer's statement, which undoubtedly was based upon hearsay testimony, does not seem to be in harmony with the known attitude of the original church.

Pardon Tillinghast, who was admitted to citizenship in Providence in 1646, at least six years before the defection occurred, and who was connected with the church as private member or pastor for seventy-two years, until his death in 1718, must have been perfectly acquainted with the character of the church from the beginning. In his deed to the church, in 1711, of the meeting-house which he had built at his own expense (Record of Deeds, Vol. XII., p. 260), the language reads, "My house, called the Baptist meeting-house." There was no other meeting-house, and as we know, there had been no other. The church worshiping in it had evidently maintained its original name and primacy as the Baptist church. Its doctrinal position is made known by the following memorandum, which appears at the end of the deed.

MEMORANDUM. Before the engrossing hereof I do declare, that whereas it is above mentioned to wit, "to the church and their successors in the same faith and order," I do intend by the words "same faith and order," such as do truly believe and practice the six principles of the doctrine of Christ mentioned Heb. 6 : 2, such as after their

manifestation of repentance and faith, are baptized in water and have hands laid on them. Signed

PARDON TILLINGHAST,
mark of
LIDIA L. TILLINGHAST.

The practice of laying on of hands was introduced among the Baptists of England and Wales about the year 1646, according to Evans' "Early English Baptists," and prevailed quite extensively. It was the result of a conscientious re-examination of the New Testament to ascertain the constitution of the primitive church and the requirements of the gospel. In their extreme conscientiousness and care to omit nothing required, some of them went so far as to practise feet-washing. Knight says: "When professors found themselves at liberty, during the confusions caused by the civil wars, to read the Scriptures and act for themselves, several of the General Baptists, as well as others, esteeming the example and precepts of Christ to be binding on all his followers, conscientiously practised the washing of each other's feet as a religious institution." So it was that every symbolic act came to be regarded as of the nature of a permanent ordinance of Christianity.

Nearly all of the early Baptist churches in New England were Six Principle, entirely or in part. In 1729 thirteen churches met in annual association in Newport, all of them Six Principle. There were

only five other Baptist churches at that date north of New Jersey, so Backus informs us, and two of these were Seventh Day. The First Church in Providence was soon after its organization evidently divided on the practice of laying on of hands, with an increasing sentiment in its favor. At length the church as a body adopted it—those who could not agree joining with Mr. Olney in another organization—and, in the words of Dr. Caldwell, "kept it, with more or less questioning over it, for considerably over a century, until the arrival of a new and happier and more liberal period in its history." Moreover, the church has always been claimed by the Six Principle Baptists as in sympathy with their views in all its early years from its origin. Knight, their historian, writing in 1827, the last year of the pastorate of Rev. Stephen Gano, says: "This has been a large, respectable, flourishing church, almost from its first establishment. It was settled upon, and constantly maintained the six principles of the doctrine of Christ, until their present pastor received the pastoral charge, since which they have renounced the imposition of hands on private members, and inclined to Calvinism, though many of the members are still in sentiment as formerly."

The simple facts, then, evidently are that from the beginning, or very soon after, there was in the church a strong sentiment in favor of laying on

of hands. In 1652–54 it triumphed, the church was divided, and the members henceforth walked in two bodies. But the question which was the seceding body, if such a question remains, does not seem to be one of very serious moment. Both branches remained Baptist churches. The point of difference was a minor one. The tree parted in two branches, and the branch which survived would inherit rightfully and inevitably the life and history of the original church, and the continuity remain unbroken.

Rev. A. H. Newman, D. D. ("History of Baptist Churches in the United States," p. 87), says: "As there was nothing whatever in the way of a church building, nor anything the possession of which would identify the party possessing it with the original church to the exclusion of a like claim on the part of the opposite party, it seems futile to base an argument for the priority of another church on the supposition that one of these parties rather than the other was the original church, and that this original church afterward became extinct."

The minor nature of the difference between the two branches will appear, when the history of the Second Baptist Church in Newport is recalled. It was organized in 1656, on the Six Principle basis, and was composed of twenty-one members, who withdrew from the First Church. For a long period of years it affiliated with the Six Principle

Baptists. In 1801 it united with the Warren Association, and so continues. In a "Historical Sketch" of the church, prepared in 1886, the writer says: "The practice of laying hands on baptized converts is continued unto this day, partly out of regard for an old custom, because there is something in it that appears pleasing and appropriate, and because the church holds property given in the name of the 'six principles,' and it is supposed that this 'rite of confirmation' so called, secures the right of administration upon those bequests." (See Minutes of Warren Association for 1886.) This practice is no barrier to full fellowship with churches which formerly would have been called "Five Point" Baptist churches. The Six Principle churches have been gradually disappearing for many years, those members who are not taken away by death generally joining other Baptist churches. Knight says: "In the revival and spread of the Calvinistic Baptists, a great part of those churches by degrees fell in with their views, and united with them." He is speaking of the more Southern churches. What he says is true also of the New England churches, especially since the beginning of the present century.

Rev. C. Edwin Barrows, D. D., in "The Diary of John Comer," edited by him and Dr. J. W. Willmarth ("Collections of the Rhode Island Historical Society," Vol. VIII.,) says, in Note 119, of the

Six Principle churches: "Many of them were dissolved, and others became Calvinistic in doctrine and renounced the laying on of hands, at least as a necessary prerequisite to the communion." And Dr. J. W. Willmarth, in a note in the same volume, p. 120, says of the old Philadelphia Baptist Association:

The churches of that body held the "Calvinistic doctrine" with great tenacity, and also practised the "imposition of hands." This ancient custom has gone out of use, in the course of time, among American Baptists, except in a few churches. It has been superseded by the "right hand of fellowship" [or "of welcome"]. In a few churches the old practice is still retained. They do not make it a "term of communion," or a subject of contention with their brethren, but are unwilling to abandon a rite which seems to them so scriptural and so significant of the gift of the Holy Spirit promised to the believer. With some of these the "hand of fellowship" follows. Others consider this unnecessary, there being no scriptural authority for it, so far as newly baptized converts are concerned; while the "laying on of hands," accompanied by solemn prayer, seems to them far superior in meaning and impressiveness. The "imposition" or "laying on of hands" is now practised by the Second and Roxborough Baptist Churches of Philadelphia, and until recently also by the Lower Merion Baptist Church, in the vicinity of Philadelphia. It is retained in the Second Baptist Church of Newport, which has now nothing else in common with the "Six Principle Baptists," but is in fellowship with the regular Baptists of Rhode Island. Whether the practice is found now in any other regular Baptist churches in the Philadel-

phia Association or elsewhere in America, I cannot say. But if we may judge from the Philadelphia Confession of Faith, and from notices in this diary and elsewhere, it was once a part of acknowledged order among regular American Baptists generally, and was by no means peculiar to the "Six Principle Baptists," whose sentiments were Arminian, and (I suppose) are so still. I am free to say that I wish the ancient custom could be restored in all our Baptist churches.

NOTE 19. Between the defection in 1652 and the defection in 1771 there was by no means unanimity in the church in reference to the practice of laying on of hands. There were always a stricter party and a more liberal party. The church was nominally Six Principle, and sent delegates to the Annual Association and entertained the Association in its turn, the other places of entertainment being principally Swansea and Newport. During this period the church undoubtedly administered the rite to all persons who were received to membership. But there was constant difference of opinion as to whether or not it should be demanded in all cases as a prerequisite to communion. Some went so far as to insist that a person coming to the communion must not only have been "under hands" himself, but must look upon the rite as so sacred and obligatory as to demand it in all other communicants, as they demanded scriptural baptism. They allowed not only no liberty of action on the part of the communicant, but no liberality of be-

lief in his mind in reference to others. Others were broader in their views, and would make the omission of the rite no barrier to communion in the case of baptized believers. About the year 1730, under the ministry of Elder James Brown, a grandson of Chad Brown, there was a "woeful breach or division," in which the leading men in the church were involved. The pastor took the more liberal view. The opponents were led by Samuel Winsor, Sr., who was then a deacon. An account of this controversy is given in Guild's "Manning and Brown University," p. 153. It was settled after more than two years of warm discussion by a concession to the stricter party in the interests of peace. The agreement was signed by twenty-four names, including the pastor and the deacon, under date of May 25, 1732, and contains these words:

> The difference between us is this, that some of us have borne with larger communion than others. We shall endeavor, by the help of God, not to offend our brethren in this thing, nor any thing whereby it shall offend their consciences, but shall endeavor to be a building up of peace and tranquillity within the spiritual walls of Jerusalem. . . So we ought to be of one body, and not tearing one another to pieces.

The church was not disrupted at this time. But the controversy was not settled. The issue was only postponed. The liberal spirit grew from year to year, and the coming of President Manning to

Providence and to the church hastened the end of a strife that had vexed the church from the beginning. President Manning had been "under hands." This fact was stated in the church letter which he brought to Rhode Island. But it was known that he was not strict in his interpretation of the rite, and the question of his communing with the church brought on the long-delayed crisis. Rev. Samuel Winsor, Jr., had been pastor for many years. His home was in the country, several miles from the church. His health was feeble and his flock was scattered. He had frequently asked to be relieved from the pastoral responsibility. In the judgment of the people President Manning's presence made it possible to grant the pastor's request. Moreover, the meagreness of the resources of the infant college made it necessary for the president to have some other means of support, as he had had at Warren. The indications of God's providence seemed very plain, and the results have given abundant proof of the wisdom of the action that was taken. Dr. Guild in "Manning and Brown University," p. 178, thus describes the action of the church:

> The settlement of Dr. Manning in Providence was hailed by the church as a happy event, supposing, as they did, that by calling him to be their pastor they could carry into effect the wishes of Mr. Winsor. He was at once invited to occupy the pulpit. He accepted the invitation, and

preached a sermon on a Sunday which happened to be the day for the administration of the Lord's Supper. Several of the members of the church were, however, dissatisfied that "the privilege of transient communion" should have been allowed to Dr. Manning; believing that he held the doctrine of imposition of hands rather too loosely, and that he practised it more to accommodate the consciences of others than to meet the demands of his own. This dissatisfaction led to the formation of a party, and to a series of church meetings, in which the majority, however, was found in every instance to be on the side of Manning. With this party Mr. Winsor himself sympathized and acted. This, however, was thought by some to be only "the ostensible reason" of dissatisfaction with Mr. Manning. The true cause of opposition to him was "his holding to singing in public worship, which was highly disgustful to Mr. Winsor." . . Finally, Mr. Winsor, in April, 1771, presented to the church a writing, signed by a number of the members, stating that they were in conscience bound to withdraw from such as did not "hold strictly to the six principles of the doctrine of Christ as laid down in Heb. 6 : 1, 2."

That it may be seen that there is no difference of opinion as to which was the seceding party, and how the secession was brought about, it may be well to quote from Knight, the historian of the Six Principle Baptists. He says in his "History," p. 257:

Elder James Manning, president of Rhode Island College, was about to remove from Warren to Providence, and Daniel Jenks and Solomon Drown, Esqs., were appointed at their church meeting held in May, 1770, to wait on Mr.

Manning on his arrival, and invite him to preach in the meeting-house. Mr. Manning accepted, and delivered a sermon on communion day, and was invited to partake with them, which he did, which caused dissatisfaction in a number of members, on account of Mr. Manning's not holding strictly to laying on of hands. Although under hands himself, yet he was willing to commune with those that were not. A church meeting was appointed in order for reconciliation, and by a vote of the majority present, Mr. Manning was admitted to their communion and transient communion allowed. The dissatisfaction continued and increased, whereupon another meeting was called previous to their next communion, to endeavor to reconcile their difficulties, when Mr. Manning was again voted to the privilege of their communion. At the next church meeting Elder Winsor and a large number of brethren laid their grievance before the church, which was that Elder Manning received those to communion not under hands. They agreed to refer the matter to the next Association, to be held at Swanzey; but when the case was laid before that body, they concluded that the church must settle it themselves. At the next church meeting in October the difficulty was taken up, and determined by vote as heretofore, after which Elder Winsor declined to administer the sacrament on account of the dissatisfaction of brethren. In April following, Elder Winsor presented a paper to the church meeting, signed by a large number of members, as follows: "Brethren and Sisters: We must in conscience withdraw ourselves from all those who do not hold strictly to the six principles of the doctrine of Christ as laid down in Heb. 6 : 1, 2."

After this a final separation took place, and eighty-seven persons, including Elder Winsor and Deacon John Dyer, were organized into a separate

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church in Johnston. It should be said that many of these members did not come from the First Church in Providence.

Johnston was three miles distant. The line of division was drawn, for the most part, between the Providence members and the country members, though a few in Providence sympathized with the departing brethren. As the former church property had been deeded by Parson Tillinghast to those who should adhere to Six Principle views, an amicable financial adjustment was agreed upon, and the church in Providence was left in possession of the property, the field, the history, and the traditions of the church, the lineal successor of the church founded by Roger Williams. This was acknowledged by both parties. The call extended to President Manning to be pastor reads: "At a meeting of the members of the old Baptist Church in Providence, in church meeting assembled this 31st day of July, 1771, Daniel Jenckes, Esq., moderator: *Whereas*, Elder Samuel Winsor, now of Johnston, has withdrawn himself and a considerable number of members of this church from their communion with us who live in town," etc.

Knight puts the date of the origin of the Johnston church as 1771, and in his "History" (1827), still lists the Providence church with the Six Principle churches; and places the date of its beginning as 1636, the year of Roger Williams' arrival in

Providence. He may have hoped even at that late day that the Six Principle leaven would reassert its power and become again a controlling element in the church. There was no disposition to deny the validity of its claim to be the original church. The records of the Johnston church began with 1771.

The controversy did not end with the call of President Manning. Traces of it remained well into the first quarter of the present century to trouble the pastor, and on one occasion he is reported to have placed his resignation in the hands of the church to bring the matter to its final issue. Such tenacity of life reveals the conscientiousness of those who looked upon the practice as an enactment of Jesus Christ.

The character of the church and the changes brought about in it by the coming of President Manning to Providence, are set forth in a most interesting manner in the following extract from a letter by Moses Brown to President Wayland. The letter is dated, "Providence, 25th of 5th month, 1833," and is found entire in Guild's "History of Brown University," pp. 207–210. Mr. Brown was then in his ninety-fifth year. He says:

I conclude to give thee my own knowledge respecting the changes and alterations in the Baptist church in this town, which was in very early time known by the name of Six Principle Baptist. In proof of this, I have an original letter of Elder Pardon Tillinghast, signed by himself,

Gregory Dexter, and Aaron Davis, in behalf of the brethren of the church in this town, dated in the 5th month, then July, 1681 ; and this is confirmed by Elder Tillinghast's deed of the Baptist meeting-house and lot to the church. . . Indeed, the difference is marked between the old church of the Baptists in this town and after Elder Manning, a worthy godly man and an excellent preacher, whom I attended in his last moments, and whom we all loved. In divers respects, however, his practice was different from the church here, and much difficulty was in the meeting upon the subject of singing and the contribution box, these being never known before. To give a vote of the church in favor of the first more particularly, the female members were called upon to vote, though not usual, and my mother and sister attended accordingly. This occasioned a serious division with the old deacons and members. Elder Manning having powerful aid from some of the old members, and being prudent enough to keep himself out of the strife, preserved the affection most generally of the church. At length a separation was concluded on, the meeting-house and lot were sold, the money was divided, the meeting-house in Johnston on the plain was built, and also the house now called the First Baptist. My brother Joseph was a member of the church, and when he brought his contribution box to my mother's pew, I now remember my reluctant feelings for him, our family and the church never having seen the like in our meeting, though often in the Congregational and other churches.

The question may suggest itself, to what extent a church may modify its belief or practice, and still retain its identity. There are Unitarian churches in New England which have, back of their Unitarian life and present denominational fel-

lowship, a century or a century and a half of Congregational life and history. They can hardly be said to have retained their ecclesiastical identity, or to be in any just sense the lineal descendants of the original churches ; and yet they claim as their own the life and history of the past, and date their origin at the beginning of the original church life, and this claim is unquestioned. The Unitarian church worshiping in King's Chapel, Boston, was originally an Episcopal church, but has abandoned the faith and government of the original church, and yet calls itself the survivor and inheritor of the past. The John Bunyan Church in Bedford is today an Independent or Congregational church, retaining the name and the memorials of the immortal allegorist, and inheriting all the treasured wealth of the history of the church to which he ministered. Other similar instances might be cited.

But the First Baptist Church in Providence has passed through no such changes in faith or practice. It has never ceased to be a Baptist church from the beginning of its history down to the present hour. During all the difference of opinion and protracted discussion about the rite, which received recognition in many Baptist churches in England and America during the last half of the seventeenth and the whole of the eighteenth century, it preserved unchanged the evangelical faith, the congregational polity and discipline, and the scriptural

ordinances. In each instance of defection the majority of the church remained to carry forward the life, the work, and the history of the church, and to preserve its continuity without break or interruption. The church has never, for a single instant, lost its existence or its identity.

It has not, indeed, either at the beginning or since, adopted any articles of faith, or put forth any creedal statement. The circumstances of its origin were exceptional, and must not be taken as a guide for to-day. Amid the multitude of religious faiths in our time, all claiming to rest upon the word of God, a church needs to have some basis of agreement, though it may be slight, on which its members may unite, and by which it may be known and distinguished. Fellowship and recognition by those outside can be secured only by some definite expression of belief. A church must stand for something, if it is to have either growth or ecclesiastical fellowship. Yet the old First Church has held its faith, and borne its name, in such a way that its position has never been misunderstood, and when it united with the recently organized Warren Association in 1782, under the guidance of President Manning, and entered into fellowship with other Baptist churches, that act was in itself a declaration of faith in points of essential doctrine and polity, though the church has always allowed the largest liberty to the individual.

The second seceding church, like the first, went to pieces after an existence of a little more than sixty years. How any candid and careful historian can regard that church as the original church, and accept the view that the First Church in Providence originated in 1771, is simply unaccountable. It is unfortunate that so able a work as Johnson's "Universal Cyclopædia," in its new edition, should give publicity to an opinion which has no argument in its support, has never had any currency, or recognition even, among historians, and rests upon an utter misinterpretation of historic facts. There needs to be a new edition of this "Cyclopædia," in which this statement, and other equally erroneous statements in reference to the early Baptists in Rhode Island, shall be revised, corrected, and brought into harmony with established and accredited history.

NOTE 20. A question has been raised in some minds as to the priority of the First Baptist Church in Providence over the First Baptist Church in Newport, aside from the question of its continuity. As we have seen, the date of the origin of the church in Providence cannot be determined positively. While it is usually given as 1639, it was undoubtedly earlier by one year, possibly by two.

John Clarke, M. D., one of the founders of Newport, a man of great learning, ability, and piety, arrived in Boston in November, 1637, where he

expected to settle and practise his profession. There is not the slightest evidence that he was a Baptist at the time of his arrival. He would not have been tolerated, if he had been. Good authority says he became "a member of the church in Boston." His departure from Boston was entirely voluntary. He was a lover of peace, and was beginning undoubtedly to have some clear conceptions of religious liberty. The antinomian controversy in connection with Mrs. Anne Hutchinson was then at its height. He himself said: "Seeing they were not able so to bear each with other in their different understandings and consciences, as in those utmost parts of the world to live peaceably together," he voluntarily determined to seek another place, "forasmuch as the land was before us and wide enough." He went first, with others, to New Hampshire, as it is supposed, but finding the winter too severe, in the spring he turned southward. He had heard of Roger Williams and his banishment, and visiting Providence on his journey, he with his companions was warmly welcomed by Mr. Williams, and at his suggestion and through his agency, they purchased of the Indians the island of Aquidneck, now called Rhode Island, and planted the new colony at Portsmouth, near Newport. This was in March, 1638.

The colony was composed of many disaffected persons from the Massachusetts Bay, some of whom

had been excommunicated on account of antinomian views. Mr. William Hutchinson, the husband of Anne, appears to have been one of the purchasers. She remained with the colony until after her husband's death in 1642. Mr. William Coddington, a wealthy merchant in Boston and a deputy to the court, who had defended Mrs. Hutchinson, and opposed, though unsuccessfully, the proceedings against Mr. Wheelwright, was the first, and John Clarke the second, of the eighteen persons whose names appear on the civil compact, signed March 7, 1638. Soon after, Arnold says May 1, 1639, Mr. Coddington, Mr. Clarke, and others established the new colony at Newport.

Being religious people they held services from the first. It is recorded that "Mr. John Clarke, who was a man of letters, carried on public worship." A church was soon organized, which was undoubtedly a Congregational church. The church in Boston sent a deputation to it to reprimand it for its disorderly conduct. This it would not have done, had the church been a Baptist church. The nature of the disorderly conduct is apparent from "Winthrop's Journal," which says: "They gathered a church in a very disorderly way; for they took some excommunicated persons, and others who were members of the church in Boston and were not dismissed." Callender says: "The people who came to Rhode Island [by which he means

Portsmouth and Newport] who were Puritans of the highest form, had desired and depended on the assistance of Mr. Wheelwright, a famous Congregational minister aforementioned. But he chose to go to Long Island, where he continued some years." These statements prove conclusively the character of the church and its doctrinal status. Neither at Portsmouth nor at Newport, where a church existed possibly as early as 1639 of which Mr. Clarke was pastor, is there any appearance thus far of Baptist sentiment. Those emigrants from the Massachusetts Bay, who were Baptistically inclined, went to Providence and not to Newport, as they would have done if there had been Baptists there at the beginning of the settlement. Governor Winthrop says (Vol. I., p. 293): "Many of Boston and others, who were of Mrs. Hutchinson's judgment and party, removed to the isle of Aquiday; and others who were of the rigid separation, and favored Anabaptism, removed to Providence, so as those parts became to be well peopled."

Moreover, the Newport church is claimed by the Congregationalists as being of their faith and order, though guilty of disorderly conduct. See "Sketches of Congregationalism in Rhode Island," by James Gardiner Vose, D. D. Rev. Dr. Ezra Stiles, pastor of the Congregational Church in Newport from 1755 to 1778, and subsequently president of Yale College until his death in 1795, in an unpublished

manuscript now in the possession of the church which he served, says :

> The first church in Rhode Island was Congregational, and settled here [*i. e.*, in Providence, where the manuscript was prepared as an appeal to the Legislature in behalf of an act of incorporation for the Newport Congregational Church] in the spring of 1636 under Rev. Roger Williams, who administered the Lord's Supper and baptism of infants by sprinkling for the first three years, till in 1639 he and his church renounced their baptism, and were baptized by plunging, Brother Holiman first plunging Mr. Williams, and then Mr. Williams in turn plunging the rest or most of them. The first church in Newport was gathered there in 1640, and was Congregational and Pedobaptist under Dr. Clarke, its elder, and continued for about four years, when it became Baptist also. . . Though the two Congregational churches, Providence and Newport, were broken up and became Baptist, yet a body of the inhabitants did not lose their Pedobaptism. Their disgust with Boston, however, prevented them from having a minister until about 1670, when there was found a considerable number of Congregationalists, which survived and lived through the desolation of our camp by the Baptists and Friends.

If the supposition is true that Roger Williams and his friends organized a church immediately on arriving at Providence, Dr. Stiles is undoubtedly correct in saying that it was a Congregational church. But of such an organization we have no knowledge whatever. Stephen Hopkins ("History of Providence," 1765) thinks it probable. He says :

The first church formed at Providence by Mr. Williams and others seems to have been on the model of the Congregational churches in the other New England Colonies. But it did not continue long in this form, for most of its members very soon embraced the principles and practices of the Baptists, and some time earlier than 1639 gathered and formed a church at Providence of that society.

But, however it may have been in Providence, we have evidence that the Newport settlers formed a church at once.

Governor Winthrop says that there were "professed Anabaptists" on the island in 1640–41. This is the earliest intimation we have, from any source, of the presence there of any persons claiming to hold Baptist views. A Mr. Lechford, writing January, 1641, of the Newport church, says: "But that church, I hear, is now dissolved." Rev. John Comer, who was the fifth pastor of the First Baptist Church in Newport, says (1730) that from "private information" he learned that his church "was constituted about 1644." Rev. John Callender, his successor, cautiously mentions the same date as the traditional one. It seems evident that the first church formed in Newport was a Congregational church, and went to pieces by reason of differences of opinion and changing views, "as was the case with divers churches in the country," and that some time between 1640 and 1644 Mr. Clarke and some of his neighbors accepted Baptist views, and began

to hold separate meetings. Dr. A. H. Newman says: "It is probable that the Baptist meeting, begun in 1641 or 1642, assumed more completely the character of a church in 1644." According to Mr. Comer, the first certain record of this church bears the date of October 12, 1648, at which time there were twelve members in full communion, and three others to be added. The traditional number of the constituent members of the church is eight.

When and by whom Mr. Clarke and his companions were baptized we have no knowledge whatever. The baptism may have been administered by Mark Lucar, an English Particular Baptist, who came to Rhode Island about this time, and is said to have been one of the founders of the Newport church. For many years he was one of its ruling elders. Or more probably, it was administered by the authorized representative of the church in Providence, possibly by Mr. Williams himself. But definite knowledge is wanting. It is this ignorance that has led a few persons, anxious to prove the priority of the First Baptist Church in Newport by showing, if possible, that the first church formed there was a Baptist church, to suggest the very improbable conjecture that Mr. Clarke had been baptized in the old world. If he had been, Roger Williams would have certainly sought baptism at his hands, instead of accepting it at the hands of Mr. Holiman, who had never been bap-

tized. The absence of any regularly qualified administrator has always been regarded by Baptist writers as the only and sufficient justification of the baptism of Roger Williams by Mr. Holiman.

Morgan Edwards says of the Newport church: "It is said to have been a daughter of the Providence church." He also adds of Mr. Clarke: "Tradition says that he was a preacher before he left Boston, but that he became a Baptist after his settlement in Rhode Island by means of Roger Williams." Knight and others adopt this view. Dr. Armitage's general statement about Mr. Clarke's change of views seems correct: "A long train of circumstances indicates that his steps had led in the same path with those of Williams in the main; through Puritanism, love of religious liberty, disgust at the intolerance of Massachusetts, and so into full Baptist positions."

It should be added that prior to 1847 the First Baptist Church in Newport did not think of claiming an earlier origin than 1644. See "Minutes of the Warren Association" for 1847. The claims made by the church at that time were completely answered by a careful and candid "Review," prepared by Dr. J. N. Granger, Dr. Alexis Caswell, and Professor William Gammell, and read to the Association September 12, 1850. The claims were shown to be groundless, and the arguments urged in their support to rest upon an imperfect examina-

tion of historic documents and erroneous inferences from them. Although the church succeeded at that time in changing in the Minutes of the Association the date of its origin from 1644 to 1638, it did not succeed in changing the belief of the denomination at large, or even of the immediate community.

Rev. Henry Jackson, D. D., pastor of the Central Baptist Church in Newport, prepared by vote of the Rhode Island Baptist State Convention, of which he was at that time vice-president, "An Account of the Churches in Rhode Island," and read it before that body, November 8, 1853. In that account he reviewed thoroughly the whole question of priority and continuity, having before him all known facts pertaining to them, and all the arguments presented on both sides, and affirmed and reaffirmed his conclusion that the First Church in Providence was "the first church gathered in this colony, and the first of its kind in the new settlements of America" He added, "It is evident that the main strength of the church belonged to that portion of it which at the division continued, as the church had always done, in the center of the town, and from which all that has ever been of any special note to Baptists, or to the denomination at large, has emanated." The division to which Dr. Jackson referred was the division of 1652. It was not until the closing decade of the nineteenth cen-

tury that there arose a historian rash enough to assert that the defection of 1771 destroyed the right of the Providence church to call itself the mother church. Dr. Jackson did not hesitate to say: "I do not question that had Comer lived until 1739 [that is, until Mr. Callender's discourse had been delivered] he would have sympathized with Mr. Callender entirely in the chronology of these churches."

Mr. Comer was born August 1, 1704, and was ordained pastor of the First Church in Newport, May 19, 1726. He could not have been more than twenty-five or twenty-six years of age when he wrote his manuscript. He did not live to revise it, dying May 23, 1734, at the early age of thirty years. The manuscript was known to be in existence for one hundred and seventeen years before the church ventured to change the date of its organization on the strength of it, and the church had had an existence for two hundred years (believing that it was probably born in 1644, which was four years earlier than the first known record), before it thought of adding an ante-natal period of six years to its existence.

In Comer's manuscript, according to the statement of Mr. Adlam, after the words "the Newport church in age is prior to any other Baptist church in America," there is this note, "excepting that of Providence." Mr. Adlam thinks this was added

by a later hand. As the manuscript (or that part of the manuscript) which contained the reference to Mr. Vaughan's visit to Providence and the age of the Newport church, has disappeared, and cannot be found in the library either of the Rhode Island Historical Society or of the Backus Historical Society, it is impossible to verify or disprove Mr. Adlam's supposition. It is possible that Mr. Comer may have ultimately reached a different conclusion.

On the other hand, the First Baptist Church in Providence has always believed that the distinction of being the oldest church in this colony, and the first Baptist church in America, belongs rightfully to it. The preamble to the charter of "The Charitable Baptist Society" connected with the church, granted by the General Assembly in May, 1774, contains the following words: "Being the oldest Christian church in the State or Colony." The inscription on the bell has been already given.

This prevailing belief in the church, in Rhode Island, and in the entire country, found expression in the language of Stephen Hopkins (1765):

> This first church of Baptists at Providence hath from the beginning kept itself in repute, and maintained its discipline, so as to avoid scandal or schism to this day; hath always been, and still is, a numerous congregation, and in which I have with pleasure observed very lately sundry descendants from each of the above-mentioned families, except Holiman.

The following paragraph is from the "Review" by Drs. Granger and Caswell and Professor Gammell :

> The priority in age of the First Church in Providence has been asserted by the unanimous voice of Baptists and of others. The story has been told by father to son, and handed down through thousands of the families of this State and land without change. The earliest chronicles have recorded it. It has been woven into every history which was ever written of the State or of the denomination. It is impossible that an event so notorious, so widely published at the time, and so universally received, could then or afterward have been misrepresented in this its most important particular.

In the absence of original church records in both cases, it is probable that the traditional dates of the origin of the two churches, viz., 1639 and 1644, though the former is undoubtedly a little too late and the latter is a little too early, will continue to be accepted as approximately correct by the great majority of candid students of Baptist history, and that the First Church in Providence will be recognized by American Baptists, in the future as it has been in the past, as "the mother church."

The unprejudiced judgment of Prof. George P. Fisher, of Yale University, covers the main points, which have been considered. In his recent volume, "The Colonial Era," p. 143, he says of Dr. Clarke and the Newport church : "At Newport he was the principal member, and the minister of an

Anabaptist church—to use the name then current—which, *after a few years*, was gathered there." And of Roger Williams and his baptism, and the Providence church, he uses the following language (p. 123): "In 1638 Williams was immersed by an Anabaptist named Holyman, and then he himself immersed Holyman and ten others. There was thus constituted the first Baptist church in America."

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